

CENTER FOR DISABILITY ACCESS
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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Andres Gomez,

Plaintiff,

V.

**Vintage Wine Estates, Inc., dba
Sonoma Coast Vineyards, a
California Corporation;
and Does 1-10,**

Defendants.

Case No.

Complaint for Damages and Injunctive Relief for Violations of: American's With Disabilities Act; Unruh Civil Rights Act

**NOT RELATING TO A
CONSTRUCTION-RELATED
BARRIER AS DEFINED IN CAL.
CIV. CODE § 55.3**

Plaintiff Andres Gomez (“Plaintiff”) complains of Vintage Wine Estates, LLC dba Sonoma Coast Vineyards, a California Corporation; and Does 1-10 (“Defendants”), and alleges as follows:

PARTIES:

1. Plaintiff is a visually-impaired individual and a member of a protected class of persons under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Plaintiff uses Talkback or similar software to navigate websites and applications on

1 electronic devices. Plaintiff is legally blind¹ and cannot use an electronic
2 device without assistance of screen-reader software (“SRS”).

3 2. Defendant Vintage Wine Estates, Inc. dba Sonoma Coast Vineyards
4 (“Sonoma Coast Vineyards”) owned or operated Sonoma Coast Vineyards
5 located in Sonoma County in March 2021 and August 2021.

6 3. Defendant Sonoma Coast Vineyards owns or operates Sonoma Coast
7 Vineyards located in Sonoma County currently.

8 4. Defendant Sonoma Coast Vineyards owned or operated the Sonoma
9 Coast Vineyards website, with a root domain of:
10 <https://www.sonomacoastvineyards.com/> and all related domains, sub-
11 domains and/or content contained within it, (“Website”) in March 2021 and
12 August 2021.

13 5. Defendant Sonoma Coast Vineyards owns or operates the Website
14 currently.

15 6. Plaintiff does not know the true names of Defendants, their business
16 capacities, their ownership connection to the property and business, or their
17 relative responsibilities in causing the access violations herein complained of,
18 and alleges a joint venture and common enterprise by all such Defendants.
19 Plaintiff is informed and believes that each of the Defendants herein, is
20 responsible in some capacity for the events herein alleged or is a necessary
21 party for obtaining appropriate relief. Plaintiff will seek leave to amend when
22 the true names, capacities, connections, and responsibilities of the Defendants
23 are ascertained.

24

25

26 ¹ Plaintiff uses the terms “visually-impaired” or “blind” interchangeably to
27 refer to individuals, including himself, who meet the legal definition of
28 blindness. (visual acuity of 20/200 or worse.) Some individuals who meet
these criteria have no vision, others have limited vision.

1 **JURISDICTION & VENUE:**

2 7. The Court has subject matter jurisdiction over the action pursuant to 28
3 U.S.C. § 1331 and § 1343(a)(3) & (a)(4) for violations of the Americans with
4 Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101, et seq. (“ADA”)

5 8. This court has supplemental jurisdiction over Plaintiff’s non-federal
6 claims pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1337 because Plaintiff’s Unruh claims are
7 formed from the same case and/or controversy and are related to Plaintiff’s
8 ADA claims. A violation of the ADA is a violation of Unruh. (Cal. Code §51(f).

9 9. Venue is proper in this court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331(b). Defendant
10 is subject to personal jurisdiction in this District due to its business contacts
11 with the District, and a substantial portion of the complained of conduct
12 occurred in this District.

13

14 **FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS:**

15 10. Plaintiff is a legally blind person and a member of a protected class
16 under the ADA. Plaintiff is proficient with and uses SRS to access the internet
17 and read internet content on electronic devices.

18 11. Plaintiff cannot use electronic devices without the assistance of screen
19 reader software (“SRS”).

20 12. Sonoma Coast Vineyards operates privileges, goods, or services out of a
21 physical location in California. These goods and services are open to the
22 public, places of public accommodation, and business establishments.

23 13. The Website is a nexus between Sonoma Coast Vineyards’ customers
24 and the terrestrial based privileges, goods or services offered by Sonoma Coast
25 Vineyards.

26 14. Sonoma Coast Vineyards offers websites and digital booking as some of
27 the facilities, privileges, and advantages offered by Defendants to patrons of
28 Sonoma Coast Vineyards in connection with their patronage at the Sonoma

1 Coast Vineyards.

2 15. Among the services offered include details about Sonoma Coast
3 Vineyards itself, location and contact information; wine products; information
4 about the prices, online ordering, deals and promotions.

5 16. Plaintiff was a prospective customer who wished to access Defendant's
6 good and services.

7 17. Plaintiff visited the Website in March 2021 and August 2021 with the
8 intent to purchase wine, or do some wine tasting, or potentially experience
9 making their own wine.

10 18. When Plaintiff attempted to navigate the Website, Plaintiff encountered
11 numerous accessibility design faults that prevented him from navigating the
12 site successfully using SRS. Investigation into his experience revealed barriers,
13 including, but not limited to:

14 a. Images on the website lack a text equivalent readable by
15 SRS.

16 b. The visualization of the webpage contains impermissibly
17 low contrast enabling differentiation of background and
18 foreground elements.

19 c. Some interface components lack programmatic
20 information that is compatible with screen reader.

21 d. Multiple links that share same functionality are not
22 consistently identified.

23 19. These inaccessible elements rendered the ostensibly "accessible"
24 elements inaccessible as a result of difficulty and confusion navigating the
25 numerous inaccessible elements.

26 20. Currently, the defendants either fail to provide an accessible website or
27 Defendants have failed to maintain in working and useable conditions those
28 website features required to provide ready access to persons with disabilities.

1 21. Despite multiple attempts to access the Website using Plaintiff's
2 electronic device, Plaintiff has been denied the full use and enjoyment of the
3 facilities and services offered by Defendants as a result of the accessibility
4 barriers on the Website.

5 22. Plaintiff personally encountered accessibility barriers and has actual
6 knowledge of them.

7 23. By failing to provide an accessible website, the Defendants denied
8 Plaintiff full and equal access to the facilities, privileges or advantages offered
9 to their customers.

10 24. Plaintiff has been deterred from returning to the Website, as a result of
11 these prior experiences.

12 25. The failure to provide accessible facilities created difficulty and
13 discomfort for the Plaintiff.

14 26. If the website had been constructed equally accessible to all individuals,
15 Plaintiff would have been able to navigate the Website and find information on
16 the winery and its goods and services.

17 27. Additionally, Plaintiff is a tester in this litigation and seeks future
18 compliance with all federal and state laws. Plaintiff will return to the Website
19 to avail himself of its goods and services and to determine compliance with the
20 disability access laws once it is represented to him that Sonoma Coast
21 Vineyards and Website are accessible.

22 28. Plaintiff is currently deterred from doing so because of Plaintiff's
23 knowledge of the existing barriers and uncertainty about the existence of yet
24 other barriers on the Website. If the barriers are not removed, Plaintiff will
25 face unlawful and discriminatory barriers again.

26 29. The barriers identified above violate easily accessible, well-established
27 industry standard guidelines for making websites accessible to people with
28 visual-impairments that use SRS to access websites. Given the prevalence of

1 websites that have implemented these standards and created accessible
2 websites, it is readily achievable to construct an accessible website without
3 undue burden on Sonoma Coast Vineyards or a fundamental alteration of the
4 purpose of the Website.

5 30. Compliance with W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
6 (“WCAG”) 2.0 AA standards is a viable remedy for these deficiencies and a
7 standard that has been adopted by California courts for website accessibility.

8 31. It’s been established that failure to remove these inaccessible conditions
9 violates the ADA and California law and requiring compliance with industry
10 access standards is a remedy available to the plaintiff.

11 32. The Website was intentionally designed, and based on information and
12 belief, it is the Defendants’ policy and practice to deny Plaintiff access to the
13 Website, and as a result, denies the goods and services that are otherwise
14 available to patrons of Sonoma Coast Vineyards.

15 33. Due to the failure to construct and operate the website in line with
16 industry standards, Plaintiff has been denied equal access to Defendant’s
17 winery and the various goods, services, privileges, opportunities and benefits
18 offered to the public by Sonoma Coast Vineyards.

19 34. Given the nature of the barriers and violations alleged herein, the
20 Plaintiff alleges, on information and belief, that there are other violations and
21 barriers on the website, and/or at Sonoma Coast Vineyards, that relate to his
22 disability. In addition to the barriers he personally encountered, Plaintiff
23 intends to seek removal of all barriers on the Website that relate to his
24 disability. See *Doran v. 7-Eleven* (9th Cir. 2008) 524 F.3d 1034 (holding that
25 once a plaintiff encounters one barrier, they can sue to have all barriers that
26 relate to their disability removed regardless of whether they personally
27 encountered the barrier).

28 35. Plaintiff will amend the complaint, to provide further notice regarding

1 the scope of the additional demanded remediation in the event additional
2 barriers are uncovered through discovery. However, please be on notice that
3 the plaintiff seeks to have all barriers related to his disability remedied.

4

5 **I. FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION: VIOLATION OF THE AMERICANS
6 WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990** (On behalf of Plaintiff and against all
7 Defendants.) (42 U.S.C. section 12101, et seq.)

8 36. Plaintiff repleads and incorporates by reference, as if fully set forth
9 again herein, the allegations contained in all prior paragraphs of this
10 complaint. Sonoma Coast Vineyards is a public accommodation with the
11 definition of Title III of the ADA, 42 USC § 12181.

12 37. The website provided by the Defendant is a service, privilege or
13 advantage and extension of Sonoma Coast Vineyards' physical presence and
14 terrestrial services.

15 38. When a business provides services such as a website, it must provide an
16 accessible website.

17 39. Here, an accessible website has not been provided. A failure to provide
18 an accessible website is unlawful discrimination against persons with
19 disabilities.

20 40. Under the ADA, it is an act of discrimination to fail to ensure that the
21 privileges, advantages, accommodations, facilities, goods, and services of any
22 place of public accommodation is offered on a full and equal basis by anyone
23 who owns, leases, or operates a place of public accommodation. *See:* 42 U.S.C.
24 § 12182(a). Discrimination is defined, *inter alia*, as follows: "A failure to make
25 reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures, when such
26 modifications are necessary to afford goods, services, facilities, privileges,
27 advantages, or accommodations to individuals with disabilities, unless the
28 accommodation would work a fundamental alteration of those services and

1 facilities. 42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(2)(A)(ii).”

2 41. Here, the failure to ensure that the accessible facilities were available
3 and ready to be used by the plaintiff is a violation of the law.

4 42. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 12188 and the remedies, procedures and rights
5 set forth and incorporated therein, Plaintiff requests relief as set forth below.

6

**7 II. SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION: VIOLATION OF THE UNRUH CIVIL
8 RIGHTS ACT (On behalf of Plaintiff and against all Defendants.) (Cal. Civ.
9 Code § 51-53.)**

10 43. Plaintiff repleads and incorporates by reference, as if fully set forth
11 again herein, the allegations contained in all prior paragraphs of this
12 complaint. The Unruh Civil Rights Act (“Unruh Act”) guarantees, inter alia,
13 that persons with disabilities are entitled to full and equal accommodations,
14 advantages, facilities, privileges, or services in all business establishment of
15 every kind whatsoever within the jurisdiction of the State of California. Cal.
16 Civ. Code § 51(b).

17 44. The Unruh Act provides that a violation of the ADA is a violation of the
18 Unruh Act. Cal. Civ. Code § 51(f).

19 45. Defendants’ acts and omissions, as herein alleged, have violated the
20 Unruh Act by, inter alia, denying, or aiding, or inciting the denial of, Plaintiff’s
21 rights to full and equal use of the accommodations, advantages, facilities,
22 privileges, goods, or services offered.

23 46. Because the violation of the Unruh Civil Rights Act resulted in difficulty,
24 discomfort or embarrassment for the plaintiff, the defendants are also each
25 responsible for statutory damages, i.e., a civil penalty. Cal. Civ. Code §
26 55.56(a)-(c).

27 47. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 12188 and the remedies, procedures and rights
28 set forth and incorporated therein, Plaintiff requests relief as set forth below.

PRAYER:

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays that this Court award damages and provide relief as follows:

1. A Declaratory Judgment that at the commencement of this action Defendants were in violation of the requirements of the ADA due to Defendants' failures to take action to ensure that its Website was fully accessible to and independently usable by blind and visually-impaired individuals.

2. For equitable nominal damages for violation of civil rights. See *Uzuegbunam v. Preczewski*, 141 S.Ct. 792 (2021) and any other equitable relief the Court finds appropriate.

3. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C § 12181, a preliminary and permanent injunction enjoining Defendants from violating the ADA with respect to its Website.

4. Damages under the Unruh Civil Rights Act § 51², which provides for actual damages and a statutory minimum of \$4,000 for each offense.

5. Reasonable attorney fees, litigation expenses and costs of suit, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 12205; and Cal. Civ. Code § 52.

Dated: March 17, 2022

CENTER FOR DISABILITY ACCESS

By: _____

Amanda Seabock, Esq.
Attorney for Plaintiff

² Note: The plaintiff is not invoking section 55 of the California Civil Code and is not seeking injunctive relief under the Disabled Persons Act at all.

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